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Materials and Nothingness

Structures and patterns in a post-industrial landscape

The materiality of cities is changing in the postindustrial era, as former industrial sites add an element of *terrain vague* to the urban texture. These sites perform a function in the city as in-between spaces that enable citizens to experience unregulated environments. The vacant lot exists as a form of nothingness that leaves room for acts and thoughts that grow out of intuitive needs since it has no preprogrammed plan. In Copenhagen, the Beauvais company created such a void when it abandoned its factory in Østerbro and moved production to rural Svinninge in the 1970s. When the old building burned down, the whole area was left to develop on its own, and today it exists as a rich texture of wild vegetation for recreational use. Geographer Tim Edensor, in his study *Industrial Ruins* (2005), investigates the development of abandoned industries and old factory buildings in Britain, to understand what they add by existing as elements of unpredictability. He suggests that the vacant lot overgrown by weeds could be considered as a kind of nature reserve in the city, a hybrid environment that adds biodiversity and organic growth to otherwise desolate places (Edensor 2005, 42). Edensor mainly focuses on the buildings and their new functions, while artist Lara Almarcegui in her practice approaches *terrain vague* in a broader perspective, developing guides for finding industrial ruins in Burgundy, France (2009) or wastelands and abandoned lots in Lund, Sweden (2005). Another artist with an interest in *terrain vague* was Robert Smithson, and in his essay “A Tour of The Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967), he tenderly and humorously treats the artefacts he finds in this industrial landscape as memorable sights.

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Maria Finn: *Grey # 14*, 2019,
pencil on paper, 50 x 65 cm
(detail).

In this article, I offer a reading of the former factory site, now known as the Beauvais lot, through some texts by the manufacturer and designer William Morris (1834–96). To capture the complexity of this post-industrial landscape I have also created a series of drawings in which the vegetation appears as patterns, informed by Morris's work as a designer. My original idea was to give an impression of the plants that were growing on the lot, since this would give an idea of what thrives on sites when left without interference. It is mostly plants that are considered weeds that blossom here, such as bindweed, nettles, brambles, and ground elder, but one can also find apple trees, golden rain, birches, and a chestnut tree. Since I wish to highlight the qualities that areas such as the Beauvais lot brings to the city, I wanted to elevate the weeds to make us appreciate them in the same way as the plants that we find in an ordinary garden. Morris studied plants in his nearby surroundings for his patterns, and I have therefore used them as a template for my own drawings to enhance the inherent beauty in the disorderly vegetation.

A visionary thinker who managed to trace the connection between production, landscape, craft, and politics in his writing, Morris reacted against the exploitation of early industrialization. A much more recent but similar approach can be found in psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari's essay *The Three Ecologies* (2000), which contributes social and psychological concepts to ecology. In a manner similar to Morris's efforts to create awareness of social injustice, Guattari's ideas broaden the field of ecology by acknowledging the psychological effects of environmental crisis. The function that the Beauvais lot has performed for its visitors could be understood as mental ecology, since the site offers a place with less regulations and control, and thus a sense of possibility. With this article I wish to explore the impact that industrialization has had on how we experience materials, and for this purpose I have analyzed Morris's patterns both as materiality and representation. My own drawings explore the vegetation on the Beauvais lot, and by presenting the plants as patterns I have tried to give them a structure that expresses how this environment exists as a noteworthy addition to urban life.

Materials

The impact of human behavior on our environment is making us aware of landscape in a new way. Instead of seeing natural habitats as places to visit and enjoy, we currently face a situation in which, in a sense, they are out of control. Global warming is changing the climate, resulting in torrential rain, hurricanes, droughts, and wildfires, as well as biodiversity loss. Old structures are incorporated into new models for urban design, usually with the aim to preserve former industrial buildings as historical sites, which consequently become monuments to a bygone

era. We have thus started a process in which we are rethinking our conceptions of how to interact with and look at the landscape. Instead of molding the landscape, we must adapt to the serious changes that lie ahead of us, and we must therefore to a greater degree regard what surrounds us as something that shapes us. Our current position is largely a consequence of what started with industrialization in the 19th century: an urge for growth and commerce, developed with little concern for the landscape, natural resources, or human beings involved in the process.

The Beauvais factory was established at Lyngbyvej and Rovsingsgade in Østerbro 1895 and was closed in 1968, when the company moved to their new factory in rural Svinninge. The old factory in Østerbro was made a protected building and could thus not be torn down when the municipality of Copenhagen acquired the lot in the following years. It was left abandoned and soon started to fall apart until it burned down, along with other buildings on the site. The municipality cleared the site with the intention to turn it into a recreational area for local residents, but later decided to open it for development. From 1983 the lot was left without much interference from anyone but local users and the area slowly got wilder, with more trees and plants making the vegetation denser. Later a skatepark was established, attracting a lot of young people. Other visitors included children playing and people walking dogs or picking flowers and berries. At a certain point when homeless people started to camp there, the municipality indicated with signs at the entrances that it was forbidden to sleep on the premises. In 2019, the construction of public housing began on one part on the lot, a proposal called *High Five*, consisting of three five-sided towers, with the intention to keep the other part as a green area.

In his exploration of the post-industrial landscape, Edensor suggests that the overgrown and rewilded areas around the abandoned buildings could be regarded as a kind of nature reserve, something that the Beauvais lot is a successful example of: “The botanical colonization of derelict land and buildings is not a static process but changes over time depending upon the longevity of the abandoned site” (Edensor 2005, 43). His own photographs from his visits to these places accompany *Industrial Ruins*, focusing mainly on the buildings, especially interiors that depict remnants from when the factories were in use, as well as from recent, more obscure activities. In these pictures we find broken windows, useless machines, locker rooms, signs with instructions, and weeds breaking through the floor. But in one photograph I discover a fading wallpaper in William Morris’s unmistakable style, a product of the Victorian era caught in one last, glorious moment.

Morris experienced the development of industrialization first hand, and I have taken an interest in his textile patterns for some time, since they offer tightly



Maria Finn: *Grey # 16*, 2019,
pencil on paper, 50 x 65 cm.

woven stories about what surrounds us. Morris's patterns combine sober observations of garden life with rhythmic ornamentation to create a unique space. At times they can be almost hypnotic in their intricate organization, and I enjoy studying them as sketches, made with pencil and a few colored fields. It is as skeletons for his patterns that I can truly appreciate them. These sketches have also inspired me to make my own drawings of vegetation, where instead of depicting garden plants I study the plants that grow on abandoned lots, especially weeds. The simple line of the drawing reveals the care Morris took at observing nature, a detail lost when all the layers of color are added. My own observations become

meticulous pencil drawings that register plants in neglected areas of the city, thus echoing Morris's patterns by exploring what is at hand, although in my case it is what I find outside of organized gardens. I find it inspiring to bring Morris's method to the Beauvais lot, to turn the weeds in this unorganized site into patterns that visualize movements and energies that are otherwise overlooked.

In my study of Morris I realized the extent of his political involvement and how he actively worked to improve the terms for the working class. Morris was born into a privileged position thanks to a steady income from his father's legacy. He studied at Oxford, then took an interest in architecture as well as the arts, studying drawing and painting. But he found his vocation as a designer of interiors and textile when he, along with his colleagues, established the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861. His path to success came from a profound knowledge of materials and craft, which he employed to produce exclusive products of high quality. As a consequence, only privileged and wealthy customers could afford his products. Morris went to great lengths to deliver a level of quality superior to much of what was produced in the early era of industrialism. This involved rediscovering old techniques. In a fascinating lecture from 1893, "The Art of Dyeing," he explains that he needed to learn about old ways of dyeing because of the poor quality of the newly developed aniline dyes:

Of these dyes it must be enough to say that their discovery, while conferring the greatest honour on the abstract sciences of chemistry, and while doing great service to capitalists in their hunt after profits, has terribly injured the art of dyeing, and for the general public has nearly destroyed it as an art. Henceforward there is an absolute divorce between the commercial process and the art of dyeing. (Morris 1889)

In her biography of Morris, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (1995), Fiona McCarthy describes how he gained his experience of dyeing at Thomas Wardle's Hencroft works in Leek, a small industrial town in Staffordshire. Together Morris and Wardle experimented with old recipes, with materials that we today would consider organic: herbs, wood, and insects. This urge to resist mere work for profit, as well as to preserve knowledge that industrialists seemed to consider superfluous, made Morris atypical as a manufacturer. McCarthy claims that it was the quest for an organic process that drove the dye experiments, but by calling it "the art of dyeing" in his lecture, Morris emphasizes the importance of acknowledging what has been accumulated through the centuries: a knowledge of how to acquire extraordinary colors from ingredients already available in

nature. Morris's description of the dyes from walnut trees, greening-weeds, and the insects cochineal and kermes presents us with a rich materiality, revealing how his knowledge within this field informed and shaped his artistic practice as a designer. This knowledge was achieved during his experiments in Leek, an experience that also taught him the costs of industrialization: pollution, smoke, and dirty rivers, as well as unhealthy working conditions. As he walked in and out of the factories, he became a witness to how the workers were treated. It was an exploitative system: long hours, little space, noise, and low wages. This further highlighted the split within him, since by being so hands-on in his pursuit of well-crafted products, he also came close to production. He was already familiar with the stately homes where the products would end up, since he often suggested which textiles and wallpapers would be suitable for particular places. During his interactions with his clients, he carried with him his experience of the other side of the process, and we can assume that this led to his political engagement. Indeed, McCarthy emphasizes that it became a point of reference: "Leek is used as Morris's yardstick. Leek has given his pronouncements their veracity and passion. He knows at first hand the squalor of the housing of the industrial north where the poor huddle beside the factories in houses that strikes Morris as the proper size for dog kennels" (McCarthy 1995, 356).

But it was not only injustice that engaged him; it was also the joy of purposeful labor, which came as a revelation. Born into a class that did not need to work with their hands, Morris now discovered that he gained great pleasure from being close to materials and engaging in the design process, whether it be embroidery, weaving, or textile printing. He also reacted against the repetitive single tasks that factory workers had to endure, and he wanted to change the fact that they could gain no satisfaction from their work. In the text "A Factory as It Might Be"—published in 1884 in *Justice*, the weekly newspaper of the Social Democratic Federation—he attempts to give an example of how one might improve factories and create better conditions for the people working in them. He stresses that a day will come when we work for livelihood and pleasure, not for profit; and to achieve this, it is necessary that the factory should be a pleasant place. To improve conditions for factory workers, he proposes that factories should be surrounded by gardens where workers can occupy themselves with gardening for relaxation from factory work. Here the satisfaction of pleasant manual work, as well as the opportunity to be outdoors, is proposed as a healthy addition to the monotonous work in the noisy factory. But the suggestion is also polemical, since he goes on to point out that factories actually have gardens already:

Impossible! I hear an anti-Socialist say. My friend, please to remember that most factories sustain to-day large and handsome gardens, and not seldom parks and woods of many acres in extent; with due appurtenances of highly paid Scotch professional gardeners, wood reeves, bailiffs, game-keepers, and the like, the whole being managed in the most wasteful way conceivable: only, the said gardens, &c., are say, twenty miles away from the factory, out of the smoke, and are kept up for one member of the factory only, the sleeping partner to wit, who in may, indeed double that part by organizing its labour (for his own profit) in which case he receives ridiculously disproportionate pay additional. (Morris 1884a)

Here Morris gives us an image of his own experience: the factory workers left behind in the smoke while he goes to visit his customers in their pleasant homes surrounded by impressive gardens. But he also emphasizes the imbalance he perceives in the system, and his own wish to challenge it. Morris's engagement with socialism was sincere, although it was never possible for the working class to attain his products. Raymond Williams elaborates on this in an essay in *Culture and Society* (1976) where he suggests that we should turn to Morris's shorter texts, such as "How We Live and How We Might Live," "The Aims of Art," and "Useful versus Useless Toil," to find the man's strong and engaged voice. In his own time Morris was a celebrated poet, as well as an author of fantastical stories and romances, but Williams emphasizes the qualities of the shorter texts, since it is here that the extent of his social criticism becomes visible. The important point is that it was his work as both a designer and a manufacturer that led to his political engagement. It was through his encounter with the realities of commerce that he discovered what he recognized as an oppressive system. His wish was not only to create a society without inequalities, but also to establish a new order that would allow workers to express themselves in their work. It is appropriate to quote what Morris himself wrote about the importance of enjoying one's daily work in "How We Live and How We Might Live," first delivered as a lecture for the Socialist Democratic Federation at Kelmscott House on November 30, 1884:

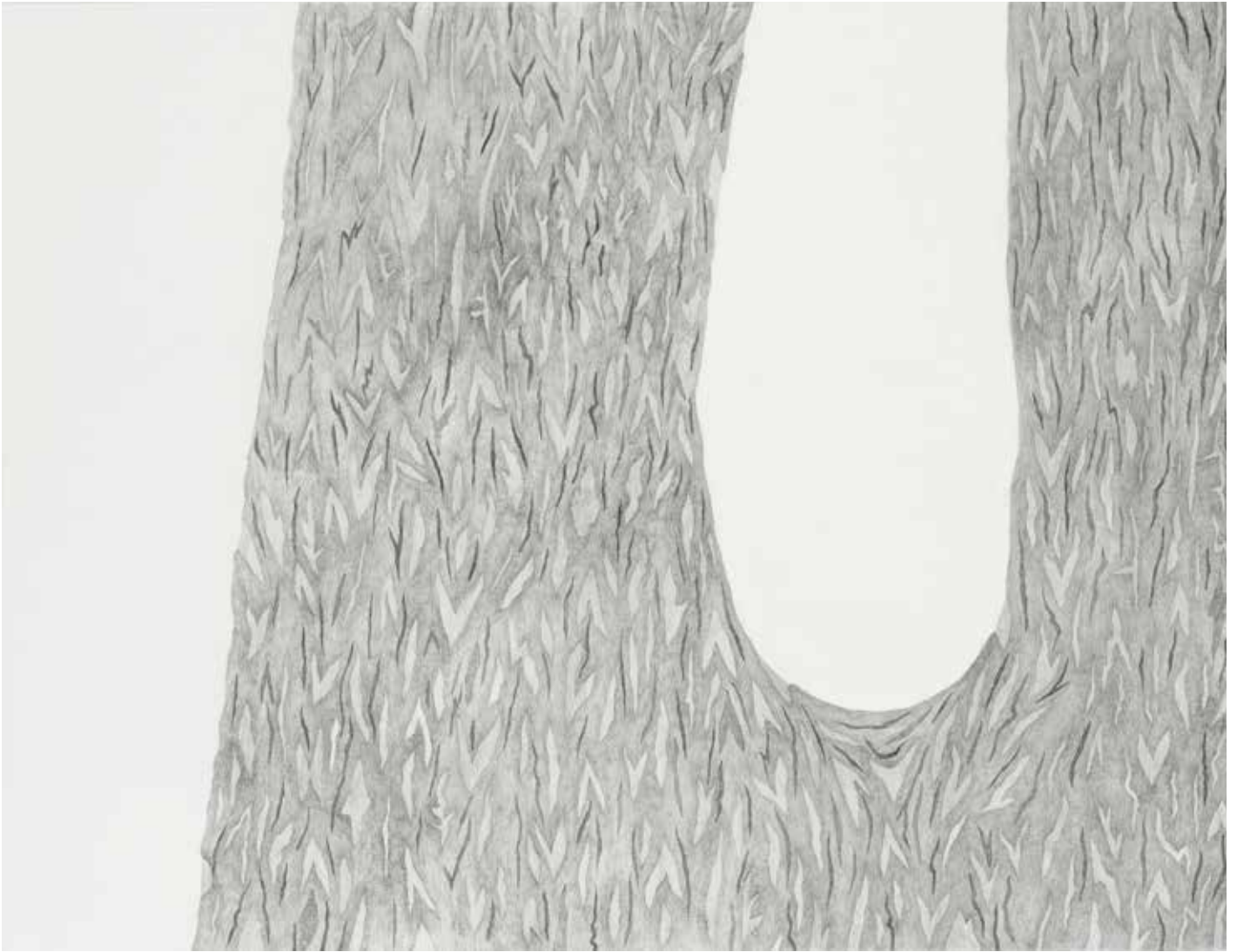
For what I want you to understand is this: that in every civilized country at least there is plenty for all—is, or at any rate might be. Even with labour so misdirected as it is at the present, an equitable distribution of the wealth we have would make all people comparatively comfortable; but that is nothing to the wealth we might have if labour were not misdirected. (Morris 1884b)

This quote reveals Morris's concerns: it suggests that a different distribution of wealth would make life much more endurable for a large part of the population, while also emphasizing the importance of being able to perform useful tasks at work.

If we in this context return to the Beauvais lot, we discover a *terrain vague*, a vacuum after the factory. When Smithson makes his trip to his hometown Passaic, New Jersey in 1967 he enters an area shaped by industry, and he enlarges the otherwise unnotable artefacts in the landscape: pipes, pontoons, a sand-box. When he documents the first monument, the bridge over the river Passaic, it sounds as he was on a proper tourist trip: "Photographing it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph" (Smithson 1996, 70). Just as the Beauvais lot has taken on a new identity in a post-industrial phase, Smithson indicates what will replace industry, a new economy based on experiences and tourism. With her guides to wastelands and industrial ruins, Almarcegui takes a similar approach, and architectural historian Jasmine Benyamin points out how her strategy in a commission for Frac Bourgogne in 2009 has similarities to Smithson's approach in his travelogue from Passaic: "As previously noted, *Ruins in Burgundy* is a travel guide, albeit an unusual one since Almarcegui's version offers a subversive type of tourism that does not reinforce conventional sites of interest, but rather redirects the reader's focus to the forgotten or soon to be gone" (Benyamin 2013, 276). On a visit to the exhibition *Offentlig handling*, curated by Mats Stjernstedt at Lunds Konsthall, Sweden, in 2005, I picked up a small catalogue by Almarcegui, *Guide to the undefined places in Lund*. Here the artist has mapped all kinds of abandoned lots and places with unruly vegetation, documented with photographs accompanied with short matter-of-fact descriptions. Again, the abandoned places has become an attraction, something worth seeking out and as indicated in several cases, like in the description of Helgonagården, worth preserving:

In Stig Sunners väg what should be a straightforward bit of grass has become completely wild. Although it is only a small area, everything in it is hidden from the street. There are enormous plants, which remind of a jungle, rubbish and bits of vegetation which form a small path, and a shed. Every time the council or the University have suggested doing up the place it has been opposed by local residents. (Almarcegui, 2005, 20)

Some of the described places have the same qualities as the Beauvais lot. Holmbergsska parken, the garden of a former summer residence, has been established as a park, to be kept as wild as possible. But while Smithson and Almarcegui to some extent share a method, I find myself inspired by Morris's way of turning



Maria Finn: *Grey # 15*, 2019,
pencil on paper, 50 x 65 cm.

vegetation into patterns. I have registered the vegetation on the Beauvais lot by depicting it in pencil drawings, a slow process where every line follows the organic development of different plants or trees, but with a less formal way of organizing their development. When I encounter Morris's designs today, I discover his joy in creating things, and that joy is also what has made his creations so enduring. Because he was concerned with creating something upon which the eye can rest—something that is demanding due to its intricate structure, and yet at the same time relaxing because of its rhythm—his patterns continue to challenge us; we discover an engaged individual behind the unfolding leaves

and flowers. The patterns are still being produced today; indeed, they never went away, and one can find noteworthy versions that reflect the tastes of their time. I have seen his *Rose* (1883) with orange notes that belong to the 1960s, and *Chrysanthemum* (1877) in all the shades of brown the 1970s could provide. Morris's patterns have been updated for today's tastes too, and we can buy shirts in minimalist versions of *Strawberry Thief* (1883). The staying power of his patterns is remarkable. They reflect his intense study of familiar vegetation, but they also transmit a sense of structure, of a deliberate organization that enables us to enjoy plants as ornaments inside our homes. They thereby bring this vitality closer to us, while simultaneously reminding us of the vegetation outside.

Structures

Our relationship with what surrounds us is built upon sensations—tactile as well as visual—and an urge to categorize and seek relationships. Morris talks about rational growth in relation to his patterns, and I find it interesting that he uses rationality as a reference since it indicates an intellectual rather than emotional approach, and rationality and order is what motivated Linnaeus when he developed his influential system to classify growing and living things. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault writes about classifying: “To observe then, is to be content with seeing—with seeing a few things systematically” (Foucault 2002, 146). Through representation, what we see can be analyzed and attached to language. Foucault uses Linnaeus as an example of how observation—the visual—becomes language. For this purpose, Linnaeus needed to find structures that could filter and limit what he observed: “His wish was that the order of the description, its division into paragraphs, and even its typographical modules, should reproduce the form of the plant itself. That the printed text, in its variables of form, arrangement, and quantity, should have a vegetable structure” (Foucault 2002, 147). It is fascinating to imagine how a whole system of knowledge has been constructed with this simple image. Through language and a systematic method, Linnaeus built a solid system with great impact. His *Systema Naturae* (1758), in which he classified plants according to their male and female sexual organs (stamens and pistils), became an important cornerstone for modern taxonomy. *Systema Naturae* is written in Latin, and it was through descriptions in this language that he managed to create a tool to categorize plants. Foucault points out how this enabled the visual to transform into structured language: “The plant is thus engraved in the material of the language into which it has been transposed, and recomposes its pure form before the reader's very eyes. The book becomes the herbarium of living structures”

(Foucault 2002, 147). This transformation changes our perception of the world, and allows language to represent what Foucault refers to as living structures.

But if *Systema Naturae* made this shift, earlier attempts to describe and order plants included images. One example is John Gerard's *The Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes* (1597). The woodcuts in this book display the plants in an instructive manner; delicate and detailed, they depict all the parts, including the roots. It has been suggested that Morris took a lot of inspiration from Gerard's *Herball*, and McCarthy mentions in the biography that he read it as a child, and later in life to his family: "William Morris's early interest in individual flower forms is not so surprising in the person who became the most floral of designers. At Woodford Hall he studied the family copy of the *Herball*, an encyclopaedic study with meticulous drawings of plant forms. As a child he was already developing his sense of floral colours, textures, scent, structures and life cycles" (McCarthy 1995, 8).

So here we have Morris at a young age studying plants in the *Herball*, becoming acquainted with the precise drawings of plants from Gerard's own garden. We also know that Woodford Hall was situated close to Epping Forest, a wild terrain to explore. These factors are likely to have been decisive in the development of a designer who references growing things in all his patterns and wallpapers. Indeed, *Willow Bough* (1887) faithfully depicts the branches of a willow so that you can almost see them moving in the wind. The nature Morris studied is arranged with formal elements that organize the growing vegetation on the surface. It is tempting to turn to Foucault again, since he makes a connection between memory and the perpetual growth in nature: "It is without doubt the continuity of nature that gives memory the opportunity of exercising itself, as when a representation, through some confused and ill-perceived identity, recalls another and makes it possible to apply to both the arbitrary sign of a common name" (Foucault 2002, 174). If we turn to Morris's patterns with this in mind, we discover fresh and direct observation surrounded by ornament—a representation. Sometimes we can recognize the flowers in the patterns, as in the delicious *Honeysuckle* (1876), but at other times we need to adjust our own image of a tulip to the one depicted in the wallpaper.

Morris discusses what he considers to be essential for a successful pattern in the lecture "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing," given to the Working Men's College in London in 1881:

Rational growth is necessary to all patterns, or at least the hint of such growth; and in recurring patterns, at least, the noblest are those where one thing grows visibly and necessarily from another. Take heed in this growth that each member

of it be strong and crisp, that the lines do not get thready or flabby or too far from their stock to sprout firmly and vigorously; even where a line ends it should look as if it had plenty of capacity for more growth if so it would. (Morris 1993, 278)

Here Morris depicts his own patterns in language, and he describes their movement: the lines should not become too loose but stay within proximity of the other parts of the pattern. He also emphasizes that the pattern needs to offer space for growth, for a possibility to expand beyond the indicated area. This contributes to the vitality of the surface, where the developing lines continue to unfold. But it is not just their vitality that makes these images so compelling; they also hint at something beyond themselves, thereby reminding us that they are a reminiscence of something experienced, just like our memories. Morris's patterns reach out toward an imagined territory, a chain of observations and interpretations that becomes a space in itself.

Nothingness

Although Morris reacted against the poor-quality products that industrialization brought, his own production was not purely handcrafted, but was accomplished with a pragmatic attitude. Morris introduced the idea of the conscious designer with a recognizable visual identity and an uncompromising approach to quality. His initiatives inspired the Arts and Crafts movement, which focused on craft, albeit with a relationship to industrial production. Links between art and industrialization can also be found among developers that used the fortunes they had amassed for art collecting. One example is the Faaborg Museum, an exquisite building by the architect Carl Petersen on the island of Funen in Denmark. The museum was founded by the industrialist Mads Rasmussen, whose company produced canned food and fruit wines in Faaborg. Another company, Beauvais, had started to produce canned food in Copenhagen in the 1850s, and in 1905 the companies merged, with Rasmussen as the director.

I own a catalog produced by Beauvais in relation to the company's centenary in 1950, illustrated with woodcuts by the artist Povl Christensen showing relevant people, places, and developments. I find it striking that the company used an artist as the mediator of its history, since it accentuates that it is a story they want to tell instead of just creating a historical document. Here I see a connection to my own drawings since the woodcuts add tactile qualities to the documentation of the place. One shows the newly established Beauvais factory in 1895, located on Lyngbyvej and Rovsingsgade, close to Hans Knudsens plads in Østerbro. The factory remained at this location until 1968, when

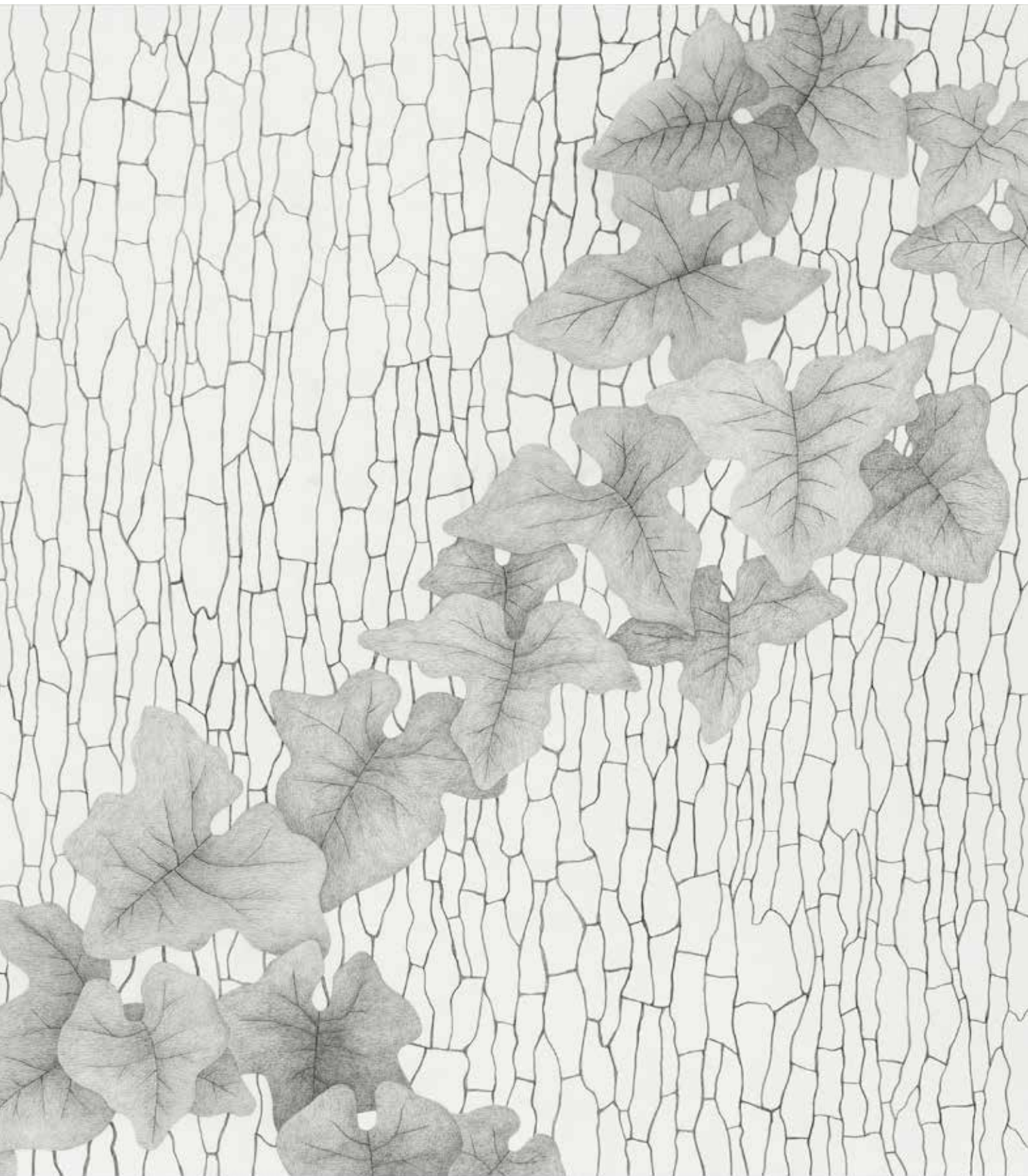
the company moved production to Svinninge in Zealand. The closure of the factory, and the workers that lost their jobs, made newspaper headlines, and the empty building was left to its own devices. A friend that lived across from the building on Rovsingsgade at the time followed its decay until it was finally destroyed by fire in the 1970s. The future of this now bare lot was uncertain: Danish State Railways attempted to buy it, but in the end the municipality of Copenhagen acquired it. There were no plans for the lot, and the municipality decided to clean it up to make it available as an unconventional green recreational area. The idea was that people could use it until a decision was made about what to establish on the site, a gesture of generosity but also of inclusion, made possible by the welfare state. The place remained without interference, and has grown into a green oasis—albeit a wild and rough one—frequented by a huge variety of users. Although it is not the garden that Morris suggests in “A Factory as It Might Be,” this former industrial site nevertheless performs the function that he sought: a space for recreation where one can enjoy plants and the changing seasons. The factory has left a void where a new landscape is created, an urban wasteland that offers a pocket of unruly vegetation within the city.

Rasmussen exploited the rural landscape of Funen as an industrialist, but he also created a museum that collected paintings depicting the transforming landscape. What is lost is thus preserved within the museum through the images by the Funen painters. This raises interesting questions concerning the new void of the postindustrial landscape growing on the remains of the old Beauvais factory. The treatment of this place makes us aware of what we consider to be worth preserving, as well as what we consider to be a noteworthy landscape. Can we call it a landscape, or regard it as nature? It is this ambiguity that makes it a unique space. The lack of organization can be overwhelming, and yet it is this disarming quality that has enabled it to continue to thrive in an anonymous, unspectacular manner. Here we can experience both decay and recovery, and the intertwining of the two creates a tactile memory. The lush vegetation gives us glimpses of something that develops without restraint, spreading in all directions without following a prescribed plan. It is a territory within the city that reveals contradictions and contests the assumption that everything in a city needs a pre-articulated function and use. The site opens itself up for reflection concerning whether every area in a city should be exploited, or whether neglect can offer unseen possibilities.

Felix Guattari’s *The Three Ecologies* (2000) attempts to rethink relationships and political organization in a world challenged by a self-inflicted ecological crisis due to competitive capitalism. Guattari expands the definition of ecology by suggesting what he labels *ecosophy*, and I find his approach stimulating,

Maria Finn: *Grey # 17*, 2019,
pencil on paper, 50 x 65 cm.





since it enables us to make useful connections in relation to changing power structures. Drawing on his background in psychoanalysis, Guattari attempts to apply ecology to a broader context by including the social and mental alongside the environmental: “Here we are talking about a reconstruction of social and individual practices which I shall classify under three complementary headings, all of which come under the ethico-aesthetic aegis of an ecosophy: social ecology, mental ecology and environmental ecology” (Guattari 2000, 41). He thus urges us to rethink the term *ecology* so as to be able to use it more broadly, to visualize how the consequences of political decisions and neglect change the climate, health, work, and the conditions under which we protest and express ourselves. Ecosophy urges us to connect the dots ourselves, to resist by opening ourselves up for unexpected connections that reveal troubling overlaps. In *Extreme Cities* (2017), literary scholar and environmentalist Ashley Dawson lays out how the consequences of global warming affect cities in coastal areas, effects he labels “environmental blowback.” Cities such as New York and New Orleans are actually protected by their surrounding wetlands during hurricanes, but due to exploitation these wetlands have become diminished, leaving the cities less resilient in the face of extreme weather. This is just one of many examples of the devastating effects of the crisis of global warming. Dawson refers to this as a form of violence, a sort of mental and social terror that acts as a new oppressive power: “Climate change is the ultimate form of slow violence” (Dawson 2017, 120). In Østerbro, the area of Copenhagen where the Beauvais lot is situated, great efforts have been made to create the city’s first climate-resilient district, following torrential rain that caused great damage in 2011. Most famous in this effort is Tåsinge Plads, where varied vegetation around dams that collect the rainwater has changed the atmosphere of the square and made it into an attractive meeting point. Nearby you also find Bryggervangen and Sct. Kjelds Plads, where canals are surrounded by bushes and trees, with winding paths and benches in between, where the vegetation sometimes becomes so dense that the sites can appear less safe. In this scenario, the Beauvais lot in its undeveloped state presents another kind of motion: a permissive and inclusive standstill. One might argue that the area reveals the potential of the unexploited and underdeveloped, and that by existing as a free space for everybody it makes us aware of the limitations of other places in the city. It is not so much what this place is as what it is not that makes clear how much the rest of the city is changing. When everything in a city is neatly thought out and developed according to rigorous plans, there is little space left for actions that are not preconceived. These spaces



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in-between are important for a city, since they leave room for individuals to experience unmapped territories that invite other readings of urban space.

I would like to return to Morris and his lecture on dyeing, specifically his description of the delicate yellow dyes. Yellow tones are those that resist light the least and are therefore the first to disappear: “Speaking generally, yellow dyes are the least permanent of all, as once more you may see by looking at an old tapestry, in which the greens have always faded more than the reds or blues; the best yellow dyes, however, lose only their brighter shades, the ‘lemon’ colour, and leave a residuum of brownish yellow, which still makes a kind of green over the blue” (Morris 1889). Morris focuses here on the fading colors of a tapestry, on something that slowly disappears, taking on different appearances in a chameleonlike fashion in the process. The Beauvais lot offers a similar space, a void filled with traces that take on new shapes year after year: the growing trees, the bramble bushes that cover everything else and occasionally are removed, the abandoned items that slowly decay and disappear under the vegetation. Morris returns to the tapestry in his lecture to point out that the faded parts still contribute to the whole story. He wishes to emphasize that natural dyes in the process of fading represent a space:

Like all dyes, they are not eternal; the sun in lighting them and beautifying them consumes them; yet gradually, and for the most part kindly, as (to use my example for the last time in this paper) you will see if you look at the Gothic tapestries in the drawing-room at Hampton Court. These colours in fading still remain beautiful, and never, even after long wear, pass into nothingness, through that stage of livid ugliness which distinguishes the commercial dyes as nuisances, even more than their short and by no means merry life. (Morris 1889)

This space, the slowly fading yarn in the tapestry, still exists as part of the tapestry, and yet is close to a sort of *nothingness*. I find this term compelling, since although Morris insists that the fading areas resist nothingness, he nevertheless invokes it as a possibility. The image is useful for comparisons with the abandoned lot, since it uses nothingness to reference a possible space. Like the faded yellows of the tapestry, the wasteland exists as something next to nothing, and yet it has a complex physical presence. And it is here that the void appears as a space with textures, a weaving together of vegetation, experiences, and memories, which transmits otherwise invisible stories about contemporary urban life. My own observations of the site has been used in drawings that turn structures in the vegetation into new patterns. Here the nothingness that the site represents is mapped through delicate lines with a pencil, combining layers of abstraction with precise renderings. The drawing is here used as a tool to investigate overlooked structures in the city, informed by Morris's revolt against industrialization, as well as Guattari's wish to expand ecology to both social and mental domains. By entering this green wasteland the visitor can experience something close to mental ecology, a space next to nothing in an otherwise regulated city. The nothingness in the Gothic tapestries that Morris refers to, the yellow dyes, exists in a similar manner in the drawings when the paper is left blank, as when a flower on the bindweed appears as a negative form among grey leaves. Between the lingering leaves and the bark on a tree, blank areas in the drawings elevate the overlooked and insignificant to a space in its own right.

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Maria Finn's contribution has been peer reviewed.